

CHAPTER I

THE INTEGRITY OF A SHAKESPEARE SONNET

L. C. Knights has described *Shake-speares Sonnets* as "a miscellaneous collection of poems, written at different times, for different purposes, and with very different degrees of poetic intensity."¹ This means, as Knights perfectly understood, that whereas each individual sonnet is a discernible product of Shakespeare's art, the collection taken as a whole is not;² or, to focus this more sharply, that the poet's artistic responsibility begins and ends within the bounds of each sonnet. The separate sonnets reflect upon one another, of course, just as Shakespeare's separate plays do; and, again as in the case of the plays, Shakespeare has sometimes suggested substantial links between different ones of them. The formal and expressive outlines of the individual sonnets are emphatic, however, and, as this chapter will argue, decisive. "The first necessity of criticism" is then, as Knights pointed out, "to assess each poem independently on its own merits."³

Knights's position is enhanced by a valuable observation recently made by Stephen Booth that "most of the sonnets become decreasingly complex as they proceed."⁴ As a "token demonstration" of their decreasing figurative complexity, Booth cites the fact that the conventional figure of time or death as an old man makes six of its seven appearances in the whole collection either within a third quatrain or a couplet; his individual discussions of Sonnets 12, 60, and 73 provide examples of more general poetic decline. Testimony for Booth's observation—and for Knights's point—is supplied by G. Wilson Knight, who has suggested that "the power of the separate sonnets tends to rise at the second or third quatrain and falls at the conclusion."⁵ This observation confirms the integrity of the separate sonnets, unfortunately, in a negative way, for it acknowledges not only that Shakespeare defined his literary responsibility within the bounds of each sonnet, but, further, that his inspiration often failed to carry him all the way. One infers that Booth would not approve of a much less challenging third quatrain—and there are many of these, as he indicates—or of a diminished second; but he argues forcefully that the demands of Shakespeare's quatrains are sometimes so intense "that the reader earns and needs the comfort of the couplet."

We do not have to dwell on the fact of poetic diminution within most of the sonnets, however, for assurance of their individual integrity.⁶ The form that Shakespeare chose for these poems and which he observed in composing virtually every one of them—all but two or three clearly inferior ones—is, as Barbara Herrnstein Smith has remarked, “one of the most highly determined . . . structures in Western poetry.”⁷ Every sonnet, English and Italian alike, is “a tight little block of print on a page”⁸—and thus impressively unified as a visual entity. But the system of rhymes by which Shakespeare defined each of his little blocks is an especially compelling one—a formal tyranny, we might have thought if it had not been for this poet’s performance.

The rhymed couplet, with which he concluded every one of these poems, is in itself a powerful definitive force: witness Shakespeare’s employment of couplets to terminate many of his scenes and most of his plays. The couplet is even more effective in closing off separate sonnets because it displaces another powerful structural principle, that of the rhyming quatrain. To this measure, which in tripartite repetition builds up a strong sense of its own formal identity and of formal continuity throughout the poem at large, the couplet, as Professor Smith has explained, presents a “terminal modification” of considerable dignity. Its indentation, which was a common, although not a universal, Elizabethan practice, enforces the effect. The 1609 edition of *Shakespeare’s Sonnets* indents the couplets;⁹ and it provides at the foot of an odd twelve-line poem, 126, which is actually six rhyming couplets, a couple of indented brackets.

A couplet by itself would not automatically, as Professor Smith has argued, close off such a three-quatrain argument as Shakespeare composed. But this poet’s couplet practice is especially emphatic, especially closural. Professor Booth has described the Shakespearean couplet generally as “gnomic”;¹⁰ and it is unquestionably the most epigrammatic, the most tightly composed, element in any Shakespeare sonnet. Individual couplets always enjoy considerable syntactic independence; every one in the collection is firmly stopped;¹¹ and almost every one is set off by a major syntactic pause from the preceding quatrain. Even Sonnet 35, which presents one of the few enjambed third quatrains in the collection, strongly indicates the line 12 break:

For to thy sensual fault I bring in sense —
 Thy adverse party is thy advocate —
 And ’gainst myself a lawful plea commence.
 Such civil war is in my love and hate
 That I an accessary needs must be
 To that sweet thief which sourly robs from me.¹²

The syntax may be, as the modern editor indicates, cut off at the end of line 11, as is the legal metaphor. Line 12 surely presents both a new figure of

speech, that of civil war, and a clause to which that defined in the couplet is attached. Thus the break at the end of line 11 seems stronger than that at the end of 12. Even here, however, the enjambment is modified and the metrical form preserved. Although the subordinate clause defined in the couplet must tie back to line 12, the couplet does contain this whole clause; and it defines a metaphor of its own, one derived from the world of crime. Not only that, but the punctuation of this passage in the 1609 edition—putting a comma after every line—allows the reader to tie 12 syntactically into the lines above it; and surely the psychological civil war declared in 12 is illustrated throughout this third quatrain; whereas, in the couplet, the broadening of the focus to include the “sweet thief” develops, as the new figure shows, if not a new understanding, a fresh perspective.

As a rule, the couplet that concludes a Shakespeare sonnet is both separate from the preceding quatrain and emphatically patterned. The first line of that concluding 109, for instance, “For nothing this wide universe I call,” defines a statement of general explanation, a statement to which the second line, “Save thou, my rose; in it thou art my all,” poses an exception. We may notice, moreover, that each of the two lines is introduced by a logical term—“For” and “Save”—and that the couplet entire is bounded at its extremes by the opposed words “nothing” and “all.” The first line of the couplet that closes Sonnet 33, again, “Yet him for this my love no whit disdaineth,” defines a reversal of the feeling developed in the body of the poem; and the second line, “Suns of the world may stain when heaven’s sun staineth,” both explains the grounds of this reversal and establishes a balanced, meditative tone that validates it.

The second lines of Shakespeare’s couplets are commonly, as in the case of 33, more patterned than the first lines—and, indeed, than any other lines in his sonnets. They thus provide a finishing closural touch. Consider, for example, the following:

- 75. Thus do I pine and surfeit day by day,
Or gluttoning on all, or all away;
- 77. These offices, so oft as thou wilt look,
Shall profit thee and much enrich thy book;
- 88. Such is my love, to thee I so belong,
That for thy right myself will bear all wrong;
- 104. For fear of which, hear this, thou age unbred:
Ere you were born was beauty’s summer dead;
- 106. For we, which now behold these present days,
Have eyes to wonder, but lack tongues to praise.

The first line of a couplet, which normally establishes its connection with the rest of the poem, is relatively fluent and discursive—as in 75 and 104 above—even when its integrity is enforced by such a device as syntactic suspense—77 and 106—or parallelism—88. This does not mean that the first line is lax; its laxity would naturally weaken the definition of the last

line and of the couplet entire. We might notice, for example, the fear-hear rhyme in the first line of the couplet from 104 and the syntactic duplicity of "to thee" in that from 88. The last line in every case, however, is more emphatically patterned and, of course, firmly stopped. We may notice the enforced parallelism—"profit . . . and enrich," or balance—"right . . . wrong," "have . . . lack"—evident in every case; the pervasiveness of the pattern in the last line of 106; and the chiasmic "all, or all" at the center of the last line of 75. The elaborate ellipsis which concludes 128, "Give them thy fingers, me thy lips to kiss," with its obvious vowel echoes, no doubt suggests a foppish preciseness—not necessarily Shakespeare's; but it is merely an extreme case of a general and pervasive stylistic practice.

Those few sonnets which are explicitly linked to the ones that follow them are concluded with couplets that have the same integrity, the same definitive effect, as all the others. The last line of 33, balancing "Suns" against "sun," "world" against "heaven," and "may stain" against "staineth," is a case in point. And Sonnet 15, the argument of which is immediately and extensively rebutted in 16, ends, "As he [Time] takes from you, I ingraft you new." Or consider, finally, the whole couplet of Sonnet 91, a poem on the explicit contradiction of which Sonnet 92 is erected: "Wretched in this alone, that thou mayst take / All this away and me most wretched make." Although it is more fluent than many others, this couplet enforces contrasts between "All this" and "this alone," and between "Wretched" and "most wretched"—the elements of the second of these being placed at or near the extremes of the measure; and it is cut off with an inversion. We may now acknowledge a literary paradox: the integrity of the couplet, that is, not only its interior patterning but also its separation from the preceding quatrains, makes it a more effective part of the sonnet it inhabits than it would be if its outlines were blurred into the preceding lines. Its integrity intensifies its interruption of the quatrains it punctuates and thus enhances the integrity of the whole sonnet.

The opening of each Shakespeare sonnet is correspondingly definitive. Even those few sonnets that begin with connectives—actually only three commence with "But" and two, with "Then"—detach themselves and turn the reader's attention forward by the end of their first lines. In the opening, "Then hate me when thou wilt! if ever, now," the first half-line clearly encapsulates all that Shakespeare wants to bring over into Sonnet 90 from the preceding poem; and the second half-line turns to the argument to come, to the topic he wishes to commend to his friend "now." This poem, like every one that casts such a backward glance, is, finally, an enclosed utterance. Almost every one of the sonnets, moreover, opens with an unmistakably fresh and new address. Consider, for example,

66. Tired with all these, for restful death I cry;

71. No longer mourn for me when I am dead;

87. Farewell! thou art too dear for my possessing;
 97. How like a winter hath my absence been;
 98. From you have I been absent in the spring;
 104. To me, fair friend, you never can be old;
 138. When my love swears that she is made of truth.

The introductory quality of such lines is, of course, heightened within the collection by the intense closural force of the preceding couplet. Once again we may note a paradox: printing the sonnets together, as in the 1609 edition and many times since, makes each poem even more individual, more singular, than if it were printed alone. And this effect, this strong closure at both ends of each sonnet, is just as impressive between the pairs of poems that share a theme or a connective tag as it is throughout the rest of the collection.

The force of this formal definition is actually most important and, indeed, most necessary to keep separate from one another those few adjoining sonnets, like 97 and 98, which might otherwise appear to constitute single discursive systems, that is, twenty-eight line poems. Consider, for instance, Sonnets 64 and 65, which share as much substance and suggest as coherent a two-sonnet unity as any two poems in the collection:

64

When I have seen by Time's fell hand defaced
 The rich proud cost of outworn buried age;
 When sometime lofty towers I see down-rased
 And brass eternal slave to mortal rage;
 When I have seen the hungry ocean gain
 Advantage on the kingdom of the shore,
 And the firm soil win of the wat'ry main,
 Increasing store with loss and loss with store;
 When I have seen such interchange of state,
 Or state itself confounded to decay;
 Ruin hath taught me thus to ruminare,
 That Time will come and take my love away.
 This thought is as a death, which cannot choose
 But weep to have that which it fears to lose.

65

Since brass, nor stone, nor earth, nor boundless sea,
 But sad mortality o'ersways their power,
 How with this rage shall beauty hold a plea,
 Whose action is no stronger than a flower?
 O, how shall summer's honey breath hold out
 Against the wrackful siege of batt'ring days,
 When rocks impregnable are not so stout,
 Nor gates of steel so strong, but Time decays?
 O fearful meditation! Where, alack,
 Shall Time's best jewel from Time's chest lie hid?

Or what strong hand can hold his swift foot back?
 Or who his spoil of beauty can forbid?
 O, none! unless this miracle have might,
 That in black ink my love may still shine bright.

The repeated term "brass" prompts the reader to refer to line 4 of 64; and having done that, he naturally goes back to line 3 to gloss "stone." "This rage" in line 3, moreover, recalls "mortal rage" in line 4 of 64, especially since it refers to "sad mortality" in the preceding line. And this echo reinforces the temptation to engraft the whole first quatrain of 64 somehow onto 65. Following this temptation, however, and neglecting the definitive force of the meter, the syntax, and the logic leads, as the second half of the very first line shows, to considerable imprecision in understanding and, indeed, to considerable literary damage.

Viewed abstractly, "nor earth, nor boundless sea" does seem to serve as a poetic shorthand for the whole second quatrain of 64, especially since the first half of line 1 has just prompted a transfer of the first quatrain: "earth" reflects the "firm soil" of "the kingdom of the shore," obviously enough; and "sea" echoes "the hungry ocean." This transference, however, misdirects the movement of 65 and blunts its imaginative edge. "Earth" and "sea," neither of which terms actually appears in 64, are the third and fourth items in a series, the second two of four general examples of the omnipotence of "mortality." One may understand the first two examples to stand for the works of man, especially so if one takes them to refer to "brass" and "towers" in 64; "earth" and "boundless sea," on the other hand, represent the enormous realm of nature: taken together these four items constitute the whole world, the subjection of which—a subjection without exception as the "nor . . . nor . . . nor . . . / But" construction asserts—is explained in line 2. And although the reference to 64 no doubt prepares the first two items of the present series to play their part in the design, the recollection of the second quatrain of 64 will ruin the vision of "earth" and "sea" that the poet is here developing.

In the second quatrain of 64, Shakespeare studied the shoreline, the ceaseless ebb and flow of waves and tides, almost as narrowly as he studied "the pebbled shore" in 60: hence "soil" with its suggestions of erosion, suggestions that are actually illuminated by the modifier "firm"; hence, also, the description of the ocean as "hungry." But "earth" is a vast and an expansive term: it represents not only the land, but the country ("this earth, this realm"); and, further, the solid globe (often balanced against "water" by Shakespeare); and, finally, planet earth entire (often opposed by Shakespeare to "heaven"). If we think of "earth" as poised here between "soil" in the preceding poem and the "boundless sea" in this, we may consider its expansiveness as an actual effect of Shakespeare's present practice. "Boundless sea," correspondingly, indicates not the wash of waves against

a vulnerable frontier, but the planetary reach of waters, that enormous swell, the extent of which human vision can never encompass.

Sonnet 64 revealed the poet in an analytical frame of mind: the verb "see," which governs its evidential materials, suggests its tone. From a variety of particular experiences and observations Shakespeare inferred not so much a general truth—although the poem verges on generality in line 10—as another particular experience, "That Time will come and take my love away." But the poet's apprehension of time in 65 is both intuitive and abstract: this poem is not an empirical exercise, a practice in inductive rumination, but a series of desperate and, indeed, hopeless questions about time's destruction of beauty, questions that constitute a "fearful meditation" and require a "miracle." To participate in it, however, one must resist the temptation to gloss "earth" with "soil" and "boundless sea" with "hungry ocean." The poet was no doubt willing enough to get the weight of a line in one word and the weight of a quatrain in two when he embarked on 65. But his expanding comprehension of this poem, in which "earth"—and not "soil" or "shore"—would be the appropriate term, forced him to raise his eyes from the restless friction of the beach and plunge his imagination into the vast and the deep. In order to adjust his own sensibilities to Shakespeare's present poetic promptings, then, the reader may briefly entertain the consonance between line 1 of 65 and the first two quatrains of 64; but as he proceeds into 65, he must resist it.

He must, moreover, totally reject the invitation to equate "sad mortality" and "this rage" with "mortal rage"—an exercise of literary self-denial that the full force of line 1, with its new rhetoric and its freshening diction, prepares him for. Despite the echoing terminology, "mortality" is placed in 65 in a new system of relationships and endowed here with a new and impressive activity: it is not observed to hold the mastery of one of mankind's less recalcitrant alloys; rather it "o'ersways" all the powers resistant and active, human and natural, in the world. To understand the reverberance of "o'ersways," the general meaning of which is, of course, "controls," consider this description of a battle from *Henry VI*, 3:

Now sways it this way, like a mighty sea
Forc'd by the tide to combat with the wind;
Now sways it that way, like the self-same sea
Forc'd to retire by fury of the wind.
Sometime the flood prevails, and then the wind;
Now one the better, then another best;
Both tugging to be victors, breast to breast,
Yet neither conqueror nor conquered;
So is the equal poise of this fell war.

In 65, as this passage suggests, "o'ersways" carries the secondary meaning of "sways over." With respect to "brass" and "stone," of course, its

primary meaning, a meaning with military connotations, predominates. This meaning will be openly developed in the next lines of the poem with such terms as "action," "siege," and "batt'ring." But "sad mortality" sways over the earth in the form of the "boundless sea"; and over the sea, although this suggestion is admittedly penumbral, in the "fury of the wind."

The military suggestions in "o'ersways," which the term "power" reinforces, may seem, once again, to draw strength from the first quatrain of 64, but, once again, such an impression is misleading. The earlier poem suggests not battle but pillage, arousing the idea of a barbaric force cruelly defacing the monuments, leveling the defenses, and enslaving the populace of a conquered citadel. In 65, however, Shakespeare presents the image of siege warfare: the clash of power with power, battering rams, threats, parleys, and desperate resistance. He augments this figure, moreover, with one that is entirely absent from 64, that of law courts, of legal actions and pleas. "Summer's honey breath" attempts to "hold out" against "sad mortality" in 65 with an "action" that is figuratively analogous both to legal and military defense; or, better perhaps, it is opposed by a power analogous at once to that of the law and that of a military siege. We may separate 65 from its companion further still, perhaps, by noticing that the figures of the later poem appeal chiefly to the ear whereas those of the earlier appeal explicitly to the eye. Sonnet 65 reverberates with the roar of a raging sea, the clash of arms, and the forensic thunder of the courts.

Although the legal aspect of time's investiture of the world is drowned out in lines 7 and 8, as the flower's "honey breath" is replaced by "rocks" and "steel," 65 continues to tear away from 64. We may notice a large-scale chiasmus in the octave that enforces its integrity: the line pairs are organized, "Since . . . How . . . / / How . . . When"; with the medial pairs defining the more delicate—especially the organic—aspects of the world, and the extreme pairs, the more resistant. Such an elaborate balance naturally enforces the governing syntax; and, although it increases the problem of tying these eight lines to the next six, it gives them a powerful cohesion. In line 7, to wind up this octave, there are, not "stones" such as might wash away, but "rocks impregnable," natural boulders, that is to say, which might reinforce a military bulwark or, more probably, a great sea cliff. In line 8, again, Shakespeare presents not brass, the shine of which might whet a conqueror's greed, but "gates of steel" that should resist the most determined assault. Both the oceanic and the military figures Shakespeare uses to discuss time's power in 65, then, are unique to 65.

It is true that 65 suffers a serious drop in intensity in its last six lines, the very lines which lack any strong connection with 64; and that the last six lines of 64, which we will soon examine, are, similarly, both self-contained and comparatively feeble. It may seem, then, that Shakespeare did not

integrate the intensities of his inspiration in composing these two poems. We do not improve matters, however, by attempting to crush them together.

The unity of the individual Shakespeare sonnet is never compromised from without: the formal definitions of these poems Shakespeare both enforced and observed—sometimes, perhaps, as in the case of 64 and 65, altogether too readily. The unity of these firmly outlined individuals is tested, rather, by the strong definition of their internal elements, primarily of the individual quatrains. "It seems clear," C. L. Barber has asserted, "that Shakespeare wrote by quatrains."¹³ Actually, his last lines are his most emphatic lines, as we have seen, and his couplets are the most tightly composed of all his rhyme units. But in Shakespearean sonnet composition we do find strength encountering strength, and the powerful integrity of the whole sonnet pressed to the definitive limit to overshadow the powerful integrity of the parts.

Shakespeare, as Professor Barber suggests, always attends to the unity and shapeliness of his individual quatrains. To demonstrate this, we may notice the very few among them that suffer any striking enjambment. In 63 and 104, to acknowledge these, the first quatrain is relatively enjambed; in 89 and 132 the second quatrain is enjambed; and in 35, 44, and 154, the third. Each of these units is, nevertheless, preserved. Consider 89:

Say that thou didst forsake me for some fault,
 And I will comment upon that offense.
 Speak of my lameness, and I straight will halt,
 Against thy reasons making no defense.
 Thou canst not, love, disgrace me half so ill,
 To set a form upon desired change,
 As I'll myself disgrace, knowing thy will.
 I will acquaintance strangle and look strange,
 Be absent from thy walks, and in my tongue
 Thy sweet beloved name no more shall dwell,
 Lest I (too much profane) should do it wrong
 And haply of our old acquaintance tell.
 For thee against myself I'll vow debate,
 For I must ne'er love him whom thou dost hate.

Line 7 seems to close a three-line sentence; and the sentence beginning with line 8 runs to the end of the third quatrain. But since 8 defines a compound predicate and, further, since it presents an antithesis between "acquaintance" and "strange," it enjoys considerable dignity; and the pause at the end of line 8, which is enforced by the *strangle-strange* echo, has a great linear, if not a sufficient quatrain, weight. Not only this, but the whole second quatrain is more unified syntactically than the modern punctuation

—the editorial period at the end of line 7—may suggest: “knowing thy will,” which is followed by a comma in the 1609 edition, could modify “I” at the beginning of 8 just as easily as “I’ll” at the beginning of 7; and the movement from 7 to 8 thus indicated is facilitated by the witty “thy will / I will” conjunction at the crucial pivot. (We may consider first one “will” and then the other to be a play on the poet’s first name—a consideration that would enforce the syntactic ambivalence of “knowing thy will,” and, consequently, the unity of the quatrain.) The reader thus confronts, first, a full stop at the end of 8—since the statement, “knowing thy will, / I will acquaintance strangle and look strange,” meets the requirement of sense; then, as he proceeds into 9, he revises his response, recognizing “Be” to be attached to “will” in 8, and endures a fluent sweep between the two quatrains. The 1609 edition, we may notice in passing, put a colon after line 8.

The third quatrain of 89 is restored in course to proper quatrain shape, furthermore, by the strong pause at the end of line 10 and the stop at the end of 12. The pause at the end of 10, which establishes the 9-10 quatrain-half, is heightened by the relative enjambment of 9. Putting unusual strain on a subordinate pause—in this case that at the end of an odd line—to dramatize a succeeding pause of greater formal importance is common in English metrical practice. Here it helps to illuminate the 9-10 line-pair, the 11-12 line-pair and, thus, the whole quatrain. The third quatrain of 89 thus absorbs the irregularity of the second and reestablishes the dignity of quatrain ordering—just in time for the couplet, the last line of which contains an emphatic love-hate antithesis, to interrupt it and terminate the poem.

The integrity of a Shakespeare sonnet is threatened in general not by the enjambment of its formal elements, but, rather, by their emphatic closure. Several of these poems actually come apart at one or another of the formal seams. Consider, for example, the first two quatrains of Sonnet 35:

No more be grieved at that which thou hast done:
Roses have thorns, and silver fountains mud;
Clouds and eclipses stain both moon and sun,
And loathsome canker lives in sweetest bud.
All men make faults, and even I in this,
Authorizing thy trespass with compare,
Myself corrupting, salving thy amiss,
Excusing thy sins more than thy sins are.

In the first quatrain, the poet consoles his friend, giving one line of personal advice, then three separate lines of analogical material explaining the grounds for such advice. Do not be grieved any more for your fault, he advises, since all the most beautiful products of nature suffer from some imperfection. Line 2 presents two examples of imperfect natural beauty, first the roses with their thorns, and second the fountains with their mud; line 3 balances two flaws against two natural beauties; and line 4 opposes

one flaw against the beauty it afflicts. The persistent practice of balance and definition, in which meter and rhetoric, working in general harmony, illuminate separate analogical items, maintains a tone of thoughtful sympathy throughout the quatrain, the elegant consonance of poetic means indicating an attitude of elegant detachment. Shakespeare's first example, "Roses have thorns," perfectly suits this attitude, moreover, so that the reader advances into the quatrain with a solid confidence in the poet's sympathy for his friend.

There is, however, a development in the analogical material that causes a remarkable divergence between the poet's tone and the meaning of his statement. "Mud," despite its unpleasant connotations, indicates no greater blemish on the fountains than the thorns on the roses, especially since these two plural items, taken together as the line suggests, present the image of a garden. But the figure in the next line is much less consolatory. The fact that the friend's fault, however natural, can be compared with happenings in the heavens, especially with such frightening events as eclipses, must extend one's sense of its seriousness. The intense verb "stain," with its suggestion of a lasting blot on the very object of interest, strengthens the reader's need to revise his understanding of the friend's flaw. The hint of persistence in "stain" is heightened by the poet's remarking that "both" moon and sun, that is to say, both night and day, are subject to such celestial blots. Taking roses and fountains together, the reader enjoyed the firm image of a beautiful garden; responding to the full scope of line 3, he faces the persistent susceptibility of the sky.

The analogical suggestions of line 4 further undermine the poet's consolation. Shakespeare gained an effect in line 3 by extending his gaze from a rose garden to the vastness of the heavens; now he gains another by narrowing his focus, withdrawing it from the glorious, if susceptible, sky and limiting it, not to a garden, but to one rose, or rather to a single afflicted bud. One organizational shift made in line 3 persists: once again the flaw is presented first. But the "loathsome canker" is, unlike clouds and eclipses, both an unnatural and a ruinous affliction. The canker "lives in" the bud; and it especially thrives, no doubt, because of its host's extreme sweetness. This blight means, of course, that the bud will never be a rose at all. We need not labor the analogical implications of this figure. We must notice, however, that the poet maintains his consolatory tone, his balanced diffidence, and that the ironic effect of line 4 is derived from this tone.

In line 5, however, the poet introduces a different theme in a different tone; and, although the thorns and the mud of line 2 fit this theme, "All men make faults," well enough, the canker, with which quatrain 1 ends, stands in irreconcilable opposition: not *all* buds are afflicted like the bud in line 4. The poet develops this new theme, moreover, in a new way, using not selected analogies, but one personal illustration: he presents himself as an

example. In the third quatrain, which was quoted earlier, he explains, not the rhetorical propriety of thus shifting his attention, but, rather, the special motives and qualities of his own conduct; and he concludes with a judgment of himself which, despite the repetition of the term "sweet," has no relevance to the first quatrain at all. Even the address to the friend, which was formally preserved through line 10, has failed: the friend ends as "that sweet thief." The figures of speech used after line 5, which are variously derived from the realms of crime, law, war, and medicine, also depart from the natural observations that informed quatrain 1. These figures have been organized, moreover, not in the definite, schematic way that Shakespeare used in presenting his garden, heavens, and bud in the first quatrain; but they have been variously interwoven with one another and submerged together in the development of his present argument. This section of 35, generally speaking, provides not a lucid, detached commentary but, rather, a tangled complex of assertion, argument, apology, and admission. The very acknowledgment of the first quatrain, "Authorizing thy trespass with compare," is a tissue of truth and falsehood: the poet did employ comparisons to treat his friend's trespass; and the first two of them may constitute an authorization of it; but surely no one could infer approval, legal or otherwise, from the poet's measured description of the "loathsome canker."

The integrity of a Shakespeare quatrain is tested, as the first one in 35 illustrates, not by the enjambment of lines and line-pairs but by their emphatic definition—just as the integrity of a Shakespeare sonnet is tested by the observance of the separate quatrains. The first quatrain of 33, for example, like that of 35 and like all three quatrains of 66, advances line by line:

Full many a glorious morning have I seen
Flatter the mountain tops with sovereign eye,
Kissing with golden face the meadows green,
Gilding pale streams with heavenly alchemy.

Line 2 seems first to fulfill a line-pair and then to participate in a three-line list. This list, each member of which is formally reflective of the other two throughout its course, confers on Shakespeare's description of morning a wonderful serenity. The inversion of the substantive and the *with* phrase in the middle line adds grace to the patterning and prepares, by a contrast working both backward and ahead, for an exquisite resolution to the quatrain. The tangled quatrain that follows, during which "glorious morning" is degraded until it comes to mean "hideous night," stands in striking contrast to the finely drawn lines and the lucid effect of this one. And yet its metrical units are also strongly indicated:

Anon permit the basest clouds to ride
With ugly rack on his celestial face,

And from the f6rlorn world his visage hide,
Stealing unseen to west with this disgrace.

Despite its imbalances and dislocations, this quatrain presents a balanced compound predicate: "permit . . . / And . . . hide." The equivalence between its two parts is asserted by the coordinate conjunction at the beginning of the second line-pair. The strong definition of these line-pairs and, moreover, the relatively firm observation of the separate lines illuminate the image of disorder and deterioration that Shakespeare is developing throughout the quatrain.

In a number of poems besides 33 (in 12, 91, and 130, among others), a predominately line-measured first quatrain is followed by a quatrain or quatrains in which the line-pair is the chief definitive measure. But many poems begin with strongly marked line-pairs. In the first quatrain of Sonnet 22 —

My glass shall not persuade me I am old
So long as youth and thou are of one date;
But when in thee time's furrows I behold,
Then look I death my days should expiate —

Shakespeare employs line-pairs to punctuate an antithesis. The effect is heightened, we may notice, by his chiasmic disposition of the main clauses of the two statements, defining them, that is to say, in lines 1 and 4. In the first quatrain of Sonnet 83 —

I never saw that you did painting need,
And therefore to your fair no painting set;
I found (or thought I found) you did exceed
The barren tender of a poet's debt —

Shakespeare has established in generally parallel order two substantially parallel statements: "I . . . saw that you did . . . / I found . . . [that] you did." Because of this parallelism the poet could enunciate the second statement more copiously and with more refinement.

To realize the skill and the care with which Shakespeare could employ the various divisions of his form, we may examine Sonnet 77:

Thy glass will show thee how thy beauties wear,
Thy dial how thy precious minutes waste.
The vacant leaves thy mind's imprint will bear,
And of this book this learning mayst thou taste.
The wrinkles which thy glass will truly show,
Of mouthèd graves will give thee memory.
Thou by thy dial's shady stealth mayst know
Time's thievish progress to eternity.
Look what thy memory cannot contain,
Commit to these waste blanks, and thou shalt find
Those children nursed, delivered from thy brain,

To take a new acquaintance of thy mind.
 These offices, so oft as thou wilt look,
 Shall profit thee and much enrich thy book.

In this poem, which was apparently designed to accompany the gift of a blank journal, the speaker commends to a friend's attention three objects of didactic value, two of which, the glass and the dial, the friend can learn from and one of which, "this book," he can use to store his learning. The first two objects are thus united in the first line-pair, and yoked together with the ellipsis of "will show thee" in the presentation of the second object; what each one will show is, however, explained in a separate line. The complex benefit the friend may derive from "this book," its use, that is, both for the storing and the rediscovery of his new knowledge, is extended over a line-pair: its value is thus shown to be both different from that of the glass and the dial and, for the purposes of this discourse, more important. Further ordering enforces and refines this impression: the glass and the dial are each given a line-pair within the second quatrain; and the book, in strict fulfillment of its introduction, is extended over the whole third quatrain. The third quatrain sustains its major pause, not at the end of its second line, but at the second line's caesura. This unifies it as a four-line system, subtly differentiating it from the quatrain above, and allows the poet to illuminate with his second line-pair the substantial knowledge, "Those children," that the book will allow the friend to preserve and cherish.

Not every sonnet reveals the meticulous metrical order or conveys the impression of intellectual control evident in Sonnet 77.¹⁴ In the openings of a few sonnets, indeed, especially 107, 116, and 129, Shakespeare seems briefly to have been carried beyond what we might otherwise have thought to be the functioning limits of his form, in each of these cases following an enjambed first line with an enjambed line-pair. But even in such poems, in 116, for instance, he has preserved the definitive elements and turned them to expressive account:

Let me not to the marriage of true minds
 Admit impediments. Love is not love
 Which alters when it alteration finds
 Or bends with the remover to remove.

The alliteration on *m* defines line 1, especially since the reader chiefly detects it at "minds," the last syllable of the line. The continuing play on *m* illuminates the first statement and validates the caesura of line 2. The periodic order of this statement, achieved by the poet's interrupting "not . . . / Admit" with the adverbial phrase, "to the marriage of true minds," has a complex formal value: it no doubt impels the reader into line 2; but it also dramatizes the tripartite organization of the statement and thus em-

phasizes, although not in the order of their formal precedence, both the end of 1 and the caesuras of 1 and 2. The balance that completes line 2, although the reader must advance into 3 to resolve the contradiction it presents, lends great dignity to the end of 2. This contradiction itself, this naked equation between "love" and "not love," although it again forces the reader forward, stands in a vivid isolation that exalts the line 2 pause. The second line-pair, moreover, absorbs the metrical dislocations of the first. Shakespeare has connected its two lines, each of which defines a complete predicate, to the same governing substantive. This regular employment of both line and line-pair ordering, which underscores the explicit assurance and reassurance of love's true nature, brings the quatrain to a stable and satisfying close.

The second and third quatrains of 116, like the first one, contain two sentences each; every line-pair, however, unlike those in the first quatrain, contains one complete sentence:

O, no! it is an ever-fixèd mark
That looks on tempests and is never shaken;
It is the star to every wand'ring bark,
Whose worth's unknown, although his height be taken.
Love's not Time's fool, though rosy lips and cheeks
Within his bending sickle's compass come.
Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,
But bears it out even to the edge of doom.

Each of these quatrains is quite different from the other; and both differ greatly from the first. The second quatrain, in striking contrast to the first, is very stable: each of its lines defines a separate clause—except for the fourth, which balances two full clauses; and its two main clauses, which come first in both cases, have exactly the same subject and the same verb. The third quatrain contains three clauses, the first running half a line, the second, which is syntactically subordinate, a line-and-a-half, and the third a full line-pair.

Despite the individuality and the individual integrity of these three quatrains, however, they have been fashioned, as in the case of Sonnet 77, into a single discursive span. The middle four of their six sentences all have the same syntactic form, "Love is *etc.*," a fact that the substitution of "it" in the interior sentences underscores. This definitive group as a whole bridges the quatrain breaks with a negative statement, two positive statements (those parallel identifications of love that are defined in the second quatrain), and another negative. The second negative shows some development, being both more refined than the first and, substantially speaking, more positive, more reassuring. The very first sentence of the poem, correspondingly, is subjunctive, prayerful, whereas the sixth, which receives support from the four definitive statements, is indicative, factual. The whole system is woven together, moreover, in a number of ways: "O, no! it is" in line 5,

for instance, emphatically reverses the sentence just above; "Love's not . . . though" in 9, again, reflects "worth's unknown, although" in 8; and "Love alters not" in 11 both echoes and heightens "Love is not love / Which alters" in 3-4—an effect that is subtly strengthened by the similarity in syntax and sound between lines 3-4 and 11-12. These three vividly outlined quatrains have been endowed, finally, with a pervasive movement, a progress from dynamic energy to enforced stability to vigorous resolution, and thus composed as one poetic utterance.

There is a great deal of truth in Professor Barber's statement that Shakespeare wrote by quatrains. We may acknowledge, besides the poems just discussed, the parallel ordering of the three figures in Sonnet 73; the return to the starting point in the second and third quatrains of 71; and the repetition of the governing preposition, "Against," at the start of every quatrain of 49. The judgment that Shakespeare has written any one sonnet by quatrains must, therefore, always be accessible to us, although to make this judgment is surely to judge against the total coherence of that sonnet. There are certain sonnets, on the other hand, each of which the poet has composed, as I must now attempt to show, into an intensely unified expressive system. The references we have just made to Sonnets 77 and 116 should suggest preliminarily how he has done this.

NOTES

1. L. C. Knights, "Shakespeare's Sonnets," in *Explorations* (New York: Stewart, 1947), pp. 55-81.

2. Perhaps the best proof of this is the long-pursued scholarly effort to rearrange these poems. See Brents Stirling, *The Shakespeare Sonnet Order* (Berkeley: California, 1968), pp. 1-13, for a description of this effort. Stirling's book as a whole presents what is probably the most sensible address to this futile enterprise that we are likely to see.

3. Knights, *Explorations*, p. 56.

4. Stephen Booth, *An Essay on Shakespeare's Sonnets* (New Haven: Yale, 1969), pp. 130-143; 65-79. It is only fair to admit that Booth, who has called the collection "a single work of art" (p. 84), would probably resist my argument. For an apparent contradiction of Booth's observation—but one that I find too abstract to carry much weight—see B. F. Skinner, "Reflections on Meaning and Structure," *I. A. Richards, Essays in his Honor*, eds. Reuben Brower, Helen Vendler, and John Hollander (New York: Oxford, 1973), pp. 202-204.

5. G. Wilson Knight, "Time and Eternity," in *Discussions of Shakespeare's Sonnets*, ed. Barbara Herrnstein (Boston: Heath, 1964), p. 68.

6. Arguments that the individual sonnets are, to the contrary, best understood and considered as merely parts of a single artistic structure can no doubt be formulated—arguments based on the persistence of a single theme in the first seventeen sonnets and the incidental appearance of shared themes throughout the collection; or on the supposition that most of the first one hundred and twenty-six sonnets are somehow related to one real man (Mr.

W. H. ?); or on the understanding that other Tudor poets composed sonnet sequences each of which was pointedly addressed throughout to a single beloved woman; or, most confidently perhaps, on the fact that all the sonnets of Shakespeare that we have were finally printed together in one volume (along with another quite distinct poetic work). Arguments of this kind are, however, largely irrelevant to such a formal examination as I am attempting; I find it hard to believe, moreover, that they could be made convincing. Using this kind of evidence, one could make a better case for the artistic unity of Donne's *Songs and Sonets*—or Jonson's *Works*—than can be made for *Shake-speares Sonnets*.

7. Barbara Herrnstein Smith, *Poetic Closure* (Chicago: Chicago, 1968), pp. 50-56.

8. Booth, *An Essay*, p. 29.

9. The couplet of Sonnet 14, which is separated from the rest of that poem, and the last line of Sonnet 131 are not indented; but both of these exceptions are surely attributable to the printer's carelessness.

10. Booth, *An Essay*, p. 130.

11. In *The Shakespeare Sonnet Order*, p. 12, Stirling speaks of "run on" sonnets; but as he himself admits, "no sonnet ends with an incomplete sentence."

12. For convenience I use *Shakespeare's Sonnets*, ed. Hyder Edward Rollins (New York: Appleton, 1951) as my basic text. Whenever it seems advisable, I compare this with The Scholar Press Facsimile of the first edition: *Shake-speares Sonnets* (London: G. Eld for T. T., 1609).

13. C. L. Barber, "The Sonnet as an Action," in *Discussions*, p. 161.

14. It is this implicit but nevertheless powerful assertion of the poet's mind, I believe, especially in a poem which, as Yvor Winters insisted—*Forms of Discovery* (Denver: Swallow, 1967), pp. 61-63—encounters the destruction of the friend's mind, that prompted Professor Winters to praise 77 as "the most impressive sonnet of all." The tardiness of this encounter, however, which Winters himself acknowledged, and the untroubled, the untested, firmness of the poet's command prompt me to place 77 in the second rank of Shakespeare's achievements.